DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 786 FL 020 257

AUTHOR Ferguson, Gibson
TITLE Conditionals and the Expression of Regret and Relief: Towards a Fragment for a Communicative Grammar.
REPORT NO ISSN-0959-2253
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 15p.; For serial issue in which this paper appears, see FL 020 251.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Edinburgh Working Papers in Linguistics; n2 p63-75 1991

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communicative Competence (Languages); Discourse Analysis; Foreign Countries; *Grammar; Language Research; *Language Usage; Linguistic Theory; Pragmatics; Semantics
IDENTIFIERS *Conditionals

ABSTRACT

This paper begins with an outline of some desirable properties of a communicative-pedagogical grammar. This serves as a theoretical point of reference for the subsequent description of a narrowly bounded semantic area, that of regret and relief. Conceptual analysis reveals a systematic relationship between these two emotions, which is grammaticalized through the so-called 'unreal conditional.' The paper then investigates the pragmatic and discoursal circumstances that encourage the selection of a conditional exponent for the expression of regret. There is, finally, a brief discussion of pedagogical implications arising from the preceding description. (Contains 28 references.) (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Brian Parkinson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED353786

FL 020 257

CONDITIONALS AND THE EXPRESSION OF REGRET AND RELIEF: TOWARDS A FRAGMENT FOR A COMMUNICATIVE GRAMMAR

Gibson Ferguson (IALS)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Abstract

The paper begins with an outline of some desirable properties of a communicative-pedagogical grammar. This serves as a theoretical point of reference for the subsequent description of a narrowly bounded semantic area, that of regret and relief. Conceptual analysis reveals a systematic relationship between these two emotions, which is grammaticalized through the so-called 'unreal conditional'. The paper then investigates the pragmatic and discoursal circumstances that encourage the selection of a conditional exponent for the expression of regret. There is, finally, a brief discussion of pedagogical implications arising from the preceding description.

1. Introduction

This article investigates an area of grammar and language use that I shall provisionally label 'the use of conditionals in the expression of regret and relief'. The objective is to contribute a small fragment toward a communicative pedagogically-oriented description of English.

A second, perhaps equally important, objective is methodological. It is to exemplify further, following the work of Mitchell (1981, 1988, 1990), a possible approach to the task of providing descriptions of English that serve the purposes of communicative language teaching.

Both objectives call for some preliminary remarks addressed to the issue of what we might mean by a 'communicative, pedagogically-oriented grammar'.

2. Characteristics of a communicative grammar

My understanding of a 'communicative grammar' is that it takes as fundamental the language learner's interest in expressing and retrieving meanings. This perspective leads to a preference for making meaning (as studied through semantics and pragmatics) the starting-point and central organising principle of a communicative description.

Of course, there are already quite a number of reference works, course books and syllabus proposals that take meaning as their classificatory basis, and range alongside these meanings their lexico-grammatical realizations. It has to be said, however, that many exhibit a number of limitations which, taken together, obscure the potential scope of a communicative description. It may be as well, then, to rehearse some these limitations here.

EDINBURGH WORKING PAPERS IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS, number 2 (1991) ISSN 0959-2253

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

First of all, the listed meanings (or notions) tend to remain unanalysed or uninterrogated with the result that there can be an under-elaboration of the range of 'meaning options' (Mitchell 1990) that a language user might wish to express. One remedy is a more careful conceptual analysis to make explicit and systematise a set of 'meaning options' for which there may or may not exist lexico-grammatical realizations in a given language. Such analysis may also reveal inter-relationships of meaning unsuspected on more superficial inspection. Once detected, these can be incorporated in a syllabus allowing greater economy in the presentation of new language to learners.

A further, oft-noted, limitation of the type of work that I am here caricaturing is that what they tend to present are simply correlations of notions (or functions) with their lexico-grammatical realizations. Missing is any elucidation of how these correlations come about - with the result that as arbitrariness comes to prevail over systematicity so the learning burden increases. What is needed is some account of the nature (and tightness) of the relationships obtaining between clusters of meanings and forms. Even better, as Mitchell (1981) suggests, would be their organisation into a system.

Yet again, some of these works seem to characterize inadequately the scope and nature of the choices that the lexico-grammatical resources of a language affords for the expression of given propositional or illocutionary meanings. Thus, while a language will often offer a variety of formal realizations for a given meaning, the choice between these is rarely free - being constrained by discoursal, pragmatic and cultural factors. Although many popular reference works and coursebooks give plausible accounts of the socio-cultural factors motivating particular formal choices, they tend to be less forthcoming about the influence of pragmatic or discoursal factors on grammatical choice.

This being so, a pedagogically useful communicative grammar should attempt to elucidate the full range of discoursal, pragmatic and cultural factors motivating selections of one formal exponent rather than another. The focus here is appropriacy of form to context, rather than of meaning to context, since the issue of whether it is appropriate, indeed permissible, to perform a particular speech act or express a particular meaning on a given occasion I regard as a matter better dealt with by the ethnographer of communication than the communicative grammarian.

The discussion thus far allows us to delineate by way of summary the following desirable properties of a communicative, pedagogically-oriented grammar.

(i) It should operate with meaning (semantics and pragmatics) as its starting point, and its main organising principle.

(ii) Within a semantically bounded area, it should make explicit the range of meanings a language user might wish to encode or decode, the interrelationship of these meanings, and their relation as a whole to other semantic areas. (cf Mitchell 1981, 1990)

(iii) It should specify the full range of lexico-grammatical realizations for the expression of each of the above meanings, and elucidate as systematically as possible the nature of the relationship holding between forms and meanings.

(iv) It should give some account of the discoursal, pragmatic and cultural factors motivating the selection of particular formal options (from a defined set of options) to express particular meanings.

An alternative way of summarizing these properties would be to say, following Rea-Dickins (1988, 1989) and Leech (1983), that a communicative grammar should, for any category of meaning, seek to relate three or possibly four levels of description: grammar in its narrower sense of 'structures' (i.e. syntax and morphology), semantics (the truth-functional study of propositional meaning), pragmatics (the study of meaning in language use as opposed to language as a formal, abstract system), and discourse (the study of the use of sentences in combination).

2.1 An approach to providing communicative descriptions

A procedure for developing communicative descriptions lies implicit in the preceding outline of some desirable characteristics of a communicative grammar. But I see little harm in making it more explicit, if only in recipe form. In so doing, I follow a route delineated by Mitchell (1990), who cites with approval the approach of Jespersen (1924).

Step 1: Circumscribe a semantic domain and strive to lay bare its conceptual structure. As we have said, failure to probe the conceptual features of a surface lexicalization may mean overlooking distinctions and relations of meaning between terms in a domain. The aim of this exercise is to identify a range of 'meaning options' that a speaker might wish to express, and to render explicit their interrelationship.

Step 2: Range the identified meanings alongside their lexico- grammatical exponents and elucidate the nature of the relationship obtaining between forms and meanings.

Step 3: Account for the various contextual factors - discoursal, pragmatic, socio-cultural - that may motivate the selection of one lexico-grammatical exponent rather than another.

Let us now test the feasibility of this approach through the investigation of our chosen area.

3. The concepts of regret and relief

Regret, which is akin to the emotions of sorrow and disappointment, has different possible sources. It may arise from circumstances lying outside the control of the speaker, or from past or present situations for which the speaker is prepared to assume some causal responsibility. Whichever is the case, a necessary feature is that regret is directed at situations which in some way earn the disfavour of the individual avowing regret. It would be anomalous, if not contradictory, for an individual to regret p, but simultaneously view p with approbation.

A qualification is necessary, however. First, to do with causation - a pervasive constituent of our conceptual apparatus (Mackie 1974). Human beings, it seems, are disposed to see situations not as discrete p's or q's but rather as participating in cause-effect relations, as p-q sequences. It is thus possible for an individual to regret a situation/act/event p not for its own sake (indeed, it might otherwise be seen as desirable) but because it is believed to be causally linked to another undesirable situation. For instance, I may regret lending my car (an act believed by some in our culture to

indicate generosity) because of my belief that that act was causally linked to the subsequent injury of a friend in a motor accident.

The general point here is that many regret expressions are embedded in a quite complex matrix of causal beliefs. It is fairly common, therefore, for expressions of regret to focus only on the antecedent cause of some undesirable situation which itself remains unmentioned either because it is recoverable from the the context of the utterance, or because the speaker assumes it can be recovered from the causal beliefs which he shares with his interlocutor regarding the relations between p and q. Unfortunately or not, this latter assumption is sometimes not met. Individuals may not share the same causal beliefs, and in these circumstances the speaker may feel obliged to spell out the reasons for regretting p in terms of its causal relationship to q, which may be, as it were, the ultimate object of regret.

I shall come presently to the implications of this for the ways in which we can grammaticalize expressions of regret. But first, it is worth pointing out that regret expressions only qualify as such against a background of general evaluational beliefs. Individuals differ considerably in their evaluation of situations as more or less desirable, and, therefore, as appropriate objects of regret. This being so, some utterances can only be interpreted as expressions of regret given a background knowledge of the speaker's belief system, a state of affairs that often does not obtain. All the more reason, then, for expressions of regret to be explained either by some explicit reference to a standard of evaluation or, as we have said, by drawing the hearer's attention to causal relationships.

A further significant conceptual feature of regret is that it seems that in regretting p we imagine a possible world in which $\sim p$ where $\sim p$ is seen as the more desirable of the disjunct $p \vee \sim p$. In other words, sincere regret seems to involve wishing a state of affairs to be contrary to what it is or was.

Regret is thus volitional in character, but, like hope, only occupies part of the domain of volition. And since the notion of volition is partly rendered in terms of the English lexical verb 'wish', it is hardly surprising to find that expressions of regret can conventionally be realized in English by sentences of the form 'I wish (that) p' where the situation referred to in the clausal complement of 'wish' is past or present.

1. *I wish I had taken his advice.*
2. *I wish I knew the reason for his absence.*

One point about 'wish' as an exponent of regret is that it is a counterfactual predicate. That is, utterances of the form 'x wish (that) p' commit the utterer to the falsity of the proposition expressed by the embedded clause. Other predicates, which are more direct and transparent as exponents of regret (e.g. 'regret', 'sorry'), are by contrast factive. That is, they commit the utterer to the truth of the propositions expressed in their complements. So, where it is true that 'x regrets p', it must also be the case that p obtains.

It would seem, then, that in expressing regret we have, at a certain level of abstraction, two options. Either we can talk in terms of an actual world where the regretted situation p obtains, in which case we may use predicates such as 'regret' or 'sorry', or we can talk in terms of a possible or hypothetical world where the disjunct $\sim p$ obtains, in which case we may use predicates such as 'wish'. The table below illustrates some exponents of regret in terms of this very elementary opposition.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 1: Exponents of regret.

	Actual world		Possible (hypothetical) world
	[Factive predicates]		[Counterfactual predicates]
3.	*I regret that p.*	6.	*I wish that p.*
4.	*I regret that I insulted John.* *insulting John.*	7.	*I wish that I hadn't insulted John.*
5.	*I am sorry that I insulted John.*	8.	*If only I hadn't insulted John.*

(As far as I can tell, an utterance is precluded from being interpreted as an expression of regret if the embedded clause following 'wish' is infinitival or refers to a realisable future situation).

Note that both '*sorry*' and '*regret*' are predicates conventionally used in making apologies, it being a condition on apologizing, of course, that the act apologized for should actually have occurred, or be simultaneous with time of utterance. It is also normal for apologies to be addressed to the wronged person(s), this being one of the factors distinguishing expressions of regret from apologies.

Let us stay, however, with counterfactuals as expressions of regret because this affords an opportunity to introduce a hitherto unmentioned emotion, relief, which, I shall argue, is semantically related to regret.

In expressing regret, one notes the existence, past or present, of an undesirable situation p but envisages a possible world where $\sim$p obtains - hence the cause for regret. In expressing one kind of relief, on the other hand, one envisages a possible world containing an undesirable situation p but notes that in the actual world p did not, or does not, obtain - hence the cause for relief.

Thus, if one's point of reference is a situation evaluated as desirable, the non-actuality of that situation may be a cause for regret, and the contrary, the actuality of the situation, if it was once in doubt, a cause for relief. Conversely, if the initial point of reference is an undesirable situation, the actuality of that situation p, given a possible world containing $\sim$p, will be a cause for regret, and the contrary, the non-actuality of p, given a possible world containing p, a cause for relief.

Now, if regret and relief belong to a semantic system of oppositions, centering on distinctions between actual and possible worlds containing desirable or undesirable situations, one may ask how this relationship is reflected in the grammar.

The answer lies in the counterfactual conditional construction - what pedagogic grammars refer to as the 'unreal' or 'type 3' conditional. Thus, an utterance such as 9 below may express, or be interpreted as expressing, relief, and an utterance like 10 below, regret.

9. *If I hadn't known the answer, I would have failed the test.*
10. *If I had taken his advice, I would have passed the test.*

Note, as mentioned previously, that the interpretation of these utterances as expressing relief and regret respectively depends crucially on knowledge of the speaker's belief system; in this particular instance, that failing tests is not in general a good thing.

A further point - which I want to expand later - is that while the constituent clauses of the two utterances above refer to situations located in past time, it is perfectly possible for the antecedent clause (the protasis) of a conditional expressing regret or relief to refer to a past situation and the consequent clause (the apodosis) to a present time situation, as in 11.

11. *If I had taken his advice, I wouldn't be in this present trouble.*

Alternatively, both clauses may refer to present time situations, as in (12).

12. *If I knew her telephone number, I would invite her to the party.*

Excluded is the possibility of the antecedent referring to present time situations and the consequent to a past time simply because conditionals used to express regret or relief are interpreted as positing a causal relationship between antecedent and consequent, and it is questionable, to say the least, whether effects can temporally precede their causes. More of this later, however. For the present, let us concentrate on attempting to construct a system from these forms used to express regret or relief.

If, then, one considers a set of conditional sentences of the same form but where there are different distributions of negation between the sentences, and their constituent clauses, one can see that this differential distribution of negation, by affecting the inferences drawn, determines in conjunction with extra-linguistic evaluations whether or not a particular sentence expresses regret or relief. In other words, from the application of differing polarity choices within the clauses there emerges 'a symmetrical pattern of equivalences' (Mitchell 1981: 111). The following table appears to represent an inverse relationship between expressions of regret and relief as realized through the so-called 'unreal' conditional.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 2: Regret and relief.

REGRET	RELIEF
13. Antecedent: If p (+) , Consequent: q. (+)	Antecedent: If not p (-) , Consequent: not q. (+)
(a) *If I had taken his advice , I would have passed the exam.*	(b) *If I hadn't taken his advice , I wouldn't have passed the exam*
Inference: x (take advice) - ; x (pass exam) -	Inference: x (take advice) + ; x (pass exam) +
14. Antecedent: If p (+) , Consequent: not q (-)	Antecedent: If not p (-) , Consequent: q (-)
(a) *If I had looked carefully , I wouldn't have cut my hand.*	(b) *If I hadn't looked carefully , I would have cut my hand.*
Inference: x (look carefully) - ; x (cut hand) +	Inference: x (look carefully) + ; x (cut hand) -
15. Antecedent: If not p (-) , Consequent: q (+)	Antecedent: If p (+) , Consequent: not q (+)
(a) *If I hadn't missed the penalty , I would have won the match.*	(b) *If I had missed the penalty , I wouldn't have won the match.*
Inference: x (miss penalty) + ; x (win match) -	Inference: x (miss penalty) - ; x (win match) +
16. Antecedent: If not p (-) , Consequent: not q (-)	Antecedent: If p (+) , Consequent: q (-)
(a) *If I hadn't spoken carelessly , I wouldn't have got into trouble.*	(b) *If I had spoken carelessly , I would have got into trouble.*
Inference: x (speak carelessly) + ; x (get into trouble) +	Inference: x (speak carelessly) - ; x (get into trouble) -

[The '+' or '-' sign in brackets after q indicates the desirability or undesirability of q for the speaker. The '+' or '-' signs under 'p' or 'q' indicates the polarity of the clauses. The '+' or '-' signs under the heading of 'Inference' indicates what can be inferred regarding the actuality of the situations referred to in the antecedent and consequent clauses.]

Note from this table that if the situation q referred to in the consequent clause is evaluated as desirable, the consequent in a counterfactual conditional cannot be negated and at the same time be used to express regret. Equally, if the situation in the consequent is undesirable, the consequent cannot have negative polarity and simultaneously express relief. Both restrictions are the outcome of the interaction of the evaluation of the desirability, or otherwise, of the situation with the effect of negation on the inference drawn as to the existential status of those situations.

It may be useful at this juncture to summarise the dicussion so far. Our starting-point was a conceptual analysis of regret, on the basis of which we identified some of its commoner exponents. This then led, by way of a consideration of counterfactuality, to a particular grammatical construction, the so-called 'unreal' or 'type 3' conditional, which, by virtue of its underlying semantic characteristics, can have the communicative function of expressing two systematically inter-related emotions, regret and relief. Whether a given conditional sentence of this type actually expresses regret or relief seems to depend, among other factors, on the evaluation of the desirability of a situation and on what can be inferred from the form of the counterfactual conditional regarding the existential status of that situation.

From a pedagogic point of view, the discussion suggests how regret and relief might profitably be grouped in a teaching unit which itself might fall within some broader category dealing with the expression of emotion.

What we have not done so far is identify precisely which conditional constructions can express regret or relief. To do so would require considerable further elaboration, so I propose at this point simply to suggest the following points. In order for a conditional to express regret or relief, it should minimally have the following semantic characteristics:

(i) there should be a causal link between antecedent (p) and consequent (q)

(ii) it should involve past or present time reference (not future)

(iii) the antecedent or consequent, or both, should receive a counterfactual interpretation.

Let us now turn to the pragmatics of the use of conditionals to express regret or relief.

4. Context and the use of conditionals to express regret or relief

In the present section the objective is to explain the pragmatic circumstances under which a full conditional construction is selected to express regret or relief when there are other perfectly adequate ways of doing so. As an initial step, we may recall that in conditionals expressing regret and relief a causal link obtains between p and q. Taking this together with Levinson's (1983: 290) point that single sentence utterances can simultaneously perform more than one speech act, one might suggest that conditionals of the kind represented in Table 2 can be expressions of regret/relief and at the same time explanations of them. To elaborate, let us extract a sentence from that table as an example:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

14a. *If I had looked more carefully, I wouldn't have cut my hand.*

This full conditional might well be a response to an enquiry from an addressee regarding the motivation for an earlier remark by the speaker of the form '*I wish I'd looked more carefully*'. In these circumstances the utterance of 14a serves to explain the earlier expression by making explicit the causal link of p to an undesirable situation q.

Put more explicitly, what is going on here is that from the speaker's initial utterance '*I wish that p*' the addressee, inferring that not p is the case and that this is intended as an expression of regret, nevertheless remains puzzled - firstly because in his estimation 'not looking carefully' is insufficiently undesirable in itself to merit regret and secondly because there is for him no stable and singular causal association between the mentioned p and an undesirable, unmentioned q. He, therefore, asks the question - '*why*', seeking a motivation for the utterance of p in terms, perhaps, of its causal relation to a hitherto unknown q.

By this stage, of course, p is part of the interlocutors' shared knowledge. It is given and topicalized. The speaker's response then is, as we have said, to explain his earlier utterance in terms of the causal relation of a p to a q. He does this by means of the utterance of a counterfactual whose antecedent refers to a hypothetical situation which is in contrast to the established actual situation, and whose consequent presents a new outcome causally resulting from that hypothetical situation.

A schematic formula for this exchange, following the notation of Ford and Thompson (1986), would be as follows:

Not X. (But) if X, then not Y. [i.e. X cause (not y)]

(this is the converse of 'X. (But) if not x, then Y'.)

What this formula brings out is the fact that the counterfactual antecedent, as in many other cases, acts to signal a contrast with a situation whose actuality is already established in the previous discourse. The conditional clause is, then, as Haiman (1978) and Ford and Thompson (1986: 357) suggest, a topic providing shared knowledge for the interpretation of the following material. In this instance, however, it is a contrastive topic in that it offers a contrast to a situation already established.

In the circumstances described above, it is, of course, more probable that the speaker, trusting that p had sufficient recency of mention not to merit repetition, would simply respond to the addressee's enquiry with '*I wouldn't have cut my hand*'.

This leads us to another alternative: that 14a might be uttered as a conversational opener, rather than as an expansion of a previous remark in the discourse. However, this would require rather unusual circumstances since the more common expressions in this discoursal position are likely to be the half conditional '*if only.....*', or the '*I wish that p*' form. The onus is on us, then, to give an account of the circumstances inviting a full conditional.

One has, I think, to envisage a situation where the speaker believes, rightly or wrongly, that the addressee not only cannot recover q from the immediate context but is also unable to infer q from the antecedent p. One must also suppose that p is not sufficiently undesirable to be in itself an apppropriate object of regret.

This last condition is necessary because it would be unusual to expand the following expressions of regret, say, by the utterance of a full conditional.

17 a. *I wish I hadn't insulted John.*
b. *I wish the fatal accident hadn't happened.*

The reason is clear. There is a wide consensus that, other things being equal, insults and fatal accidents are undesirable, hence regrettable, not because they are causally or contingently associated with other undesirable eventualities, but because they are so in themselves. It would be strange, then, to explain regret for insulting John in terms of its consequences. Indeed, to do so would imply either that the addressse did not understand what insults were, or that the speaker and addressee shared an amoral, Machiavellian outlook on human conduct. Perhaps the same factor also explains why it seems more natural to express regret for insults, or any other obviously undesirable situations, in terms of the predicate '*wish*' rather than the half-conditional '*if only....*', since the use of the latter may imply a calculated consideration of consequences.

Let us sum up. In this section we have argued that full conditionals expressing regret or relief may at the same time be explanations, particularly where they expand regret expressions occurring earlier in the discourse. We also argued that conditionals are unlikely to be selected to express regret in preference to other forms when the speaker believes that the addressee can recover the undesirable situation q either directly from the context itself or by inferring q from the mention of p through exploiting a knowledge of causal relations. A full conditional is also unlikely when a situation is adjudged undesirable in itself irrespective of its causal associations.

Finally, as regards discourse, we suggested that the counterfactual antecedent clause of conditionals cohere with the preceding discourse by introducing a hypothetical situation which is in contrast to a assumed actual situation. The consequent then presents a new, and more desirable situation, resulting from that hypothetical situation. In other words, the counterfactuality of the conditional clause signals a contrast, and this provides a basis of shared knowledge for the interpretation of the material in the consequent. To that extent the conditional clause is, as Haiman (1978) argues, a topic.

5. Conclusion and pedagogic implications

On the assumption that the implementation of a procedure offers some indication of its feasibility, let us turn our attention immediately to the descriptive information that our procedure has provided.

Our initial conceptual analysis revealed a semantic relationship between regret and relief which appeared to be instantiated in grammar in the so- called 'type 3' conditional. This was seen to possess a communicative potentiality for expressing either emotion. By constructing a table, we were able to show how this communicative potentiality might be realised in a unified system of lexico-grammatical options.

We then suggested without further elaboration that for a conditional construction to express either emotion there has to be (i) a causal link between antecedent and consequent, (ii) past or present time reference, and (iii) the antecedent or consequent should receive a counterfactual interpretation.

Finally, we sketched out the pragmatic and discoursal circumstances inviting a full conditional as opposed to a half-conditional with either a suppressed antecedent or a suppressed consequent. The discussion at this point can, however, only be regarded as suggestive, and not as comprehensive. Clearly, further investigation is required.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Let us turn finally to the pedagogic implications. A sceptical observer might point out that we have only dealt with a very small area of grammar, and one that does not have a particularly frequent occurrence in ordinary discourse at that. One can, I think, concede these points without damage to the overall thrust of the argument.

Regarding the sceptic's latter point, my own observations of a limited corpus of conditional utterances suggest that full conditionals are, indeed, relatively rarely used to express regret or relief. However, from the limited frequency of an exponent of a function in a corpus based on native speaker interaction, it does not necessarily follow that there is little use in teaching that exponent to learners. We have already noted that full conditionals expressing regret or relief are, because of their explanatory function, more likely in situations where the evaluational or causal beliefs of speaker and hearer diverge. It strikes one that it is precisely these circumstances, calling for a greater degree of explicitness and explanatory work, that confront the non-native learner with a relatively higher frequency than the native speaker. If this is so, one might hypothesize that a full conditional for regret or relief may have a correspondingly higher utility.

In speaking of explanation, one is reminded that conditionals serve an explanatory function in other contexts: for example, in explaining or amplifying inferences and deductions. This is recognized in the EFL coursebook *Meanings into Words* (Doff, Jones and Mitchell 1984), which features the use of the type 2 and type 3 conditionals as explanations for inferences (Unit 7 'Deductions and Explanations'). An illustrative dialogue might run as follows:

18. *A:* *He can't be a doctor.*
B: *Why do you say that?*
A: *If he was a doctor, he would know what gangrene was.*

Notice that here there is a somewhat attenuated causal link between antecedent and consequent. It might be more appropriate, then, to characterize the nature of the link in terms of logical contingency. The point of mentioning this use of conditionals is to draw attention to the similarities betweeen conditionals used as amplifications of regret expressions and those used as explanations for inferences. The similarities suggest posssibilities for grouping these explanatory uses together for purposes of presentation and practice.

A rather useful exercise which does something along these lines can be found in *Prospects* (Percil and Gray 1988) in a chapter entitled 'Logical Relations'. The rubric for the exercise is as follows:

> *Suggest possible conditional 3 sentences prompted by the following. There is often more than one possibility.*

Under this rubric appear such statements as:

> *Some historians maintain that President Kennedy's assasination saved him from the unpopularity that would have come to him as a result of US involvement in Vietnam.*
>
> *The Challenger space-shuttle disaster was caused by unusually low temperatures immediately before the launch.*

To this exercise, which involves the reduction of causal assertions to counterfactual assertions, I would simply suggest the addition of utterances making inferences or

expressing regret but which seem to invite some further amplification. Sentence 19 might be an example.

19. *I wish I had studied Greek at school.*

In answer to our sceptic's first point - that we have only dealt with a small area of grammar - I would point out again that one of our aims is methodological, and that, therefore, narrowness of scope is not necessarily reprehensible. After all, the present approach is not greatly different from that of the theoretical linguist whose narrowly focused descriptions are intended to make wider theoretical points.

With regard to methodological procedure, I think it is worth remarking finally that one of the merits of pursuing a semantic line of investigation is that it facilitates the identification of conceptual features which are shared across functional areas. These areas can then be usefully and illuminatingly grouped together, whereas, otherwise, they might be treated with in different parts of a pedagogic grammar. In this article, for example, we have noted how the shared conceptual features of regret and relief permit them both to be expressed through the 'third' conditional.

The identification of interrelationships at a semantic level, and the working out of their ramifications at the level of surface realizations, not only suggests alternative organizational possibilities in the grammar

syllabus or materials. It also, I believe, affords an opportunity for drawing the attention of teachers to systematic relationships , for strengthening networks of associations. This may, in turn, help distance one from the type of content found in the traditional grammar syllabus that Rutherford (1987) unfavourably - and possibly correctly - characterizes in the following terms:

> What goes into such a syllabus (the 'familiar grammatical syllabus') for purposes of display, explication, and practice is an inventory of isolated constructs made available to pedagogy through some form of linguistic analysis.
>
> (Rutherford 1987: 157)

My final point is really Strawson's, who remarks that "the logic of ordinary speech provides a field of intellectual study unsurpassed in richness, complexity, and the power to absorb" (Strawson 1952: 232). I would simply add that such study may also have a practical spin-off in that it has the potential to contribute to more sensitive pedagogical-communicative descriptions of English, or, indeed, of any language.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

References

Akatsuka N. 1985. 'Conditionals and epistemic scale'. Language 61: 625- 39.

Akatsuka N. 1986. 'Conditionals are discourse-bound' in Traugott et al. (eds) 1986: 335-51.

Austin J.L. 1946. 'Other minds' in Urmson J. and Warnock G. (eds) 1970. Philosophical Papers. (2nd edition). Oxford: OUP. 76-116.

Brown P. and Levinson S. 1978. 'Universals in language use: politeness phenomena' in Goody E. (ed.) 1978. Questions and Politeness. Cambridge: CUP.

Comrie B. 1986. 'Conditionals: a typology' in Traugott et al. (eds) 1986: 77-99.

Doff A., Jones C. and Mitchell K. 1984. Meanings into Words: Upper Intermediate. Cambridge: CUP.

Fillenbaum S. 1986. 'The use of conditionals in inducements and deterrents' in Traugott et al. (eds) 1986: 179-95.

Ford C.E. and Thompson S.A. 1986. 'Conditionals in discourse: a text-based study' in Traugott et al. (eds) 1986: 353-72.

Geis M. and Zwicky A. 1971. 'On invited inferences'. Linguistic Inquiry 2: 561-5.

Grice H.P. 1975. 'Logic and conversation' in Cole P. & Morgan J.L. (eds) 1975. Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts. New York: Academic Press. 45-58.

Haiman J. 1978. 'Conditionals are topics'. Language 54: 564-89.

Jespersen 1924. The Philosophy of Grammar. London: Allen & Unwin.

Johnson-Laird P.N. 1986. 'Conditionals and mental models' in Traugott et al. (eds) 1986: 55-75.

Leech G.N. 1983. Principles of Pragmatics. London: Longman.

Levinson S. 1983. Pragmatics. Cambridge: CUP.

Mackie J.L. 1974/1979. The Cement of the Universe. Oxford: OUP. (Extract) reprinted as 'A conditional analysis of the concept of causation' in Honderich T. and Burnyeat M. (eds) 1979. Philosophy as It Is. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 387-416.

Mitchell K. 1981. 'Illocutionary acts in a pedagogical description: the grammar of requests and offers' in Richterich R. and Widdowson H.G. (eds) 1981. Description, presentation et enseignement des langues' Paris: Hatier/Credif. 103-119.

Mitchell K. 1988. 'Modals' in Bald W.D. (ed) Kernprobleme Englischer Grammatik. Munich: Langenscheid. 173-91.

Mitchell K. 1990. 'On comparisons in a notional grammar'. Applied Linguistics. 11/1: 52-72.

Percil J. and Gray J. 1989. Prospects. London: Penguin.

Quine W.V.O. 1950. Methods of Logic. New York: Holt.

Quirk R., Greenbaum S., Leech G. and Svartvik J. 1985. A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language. London: Longman.

Rea-Dickins P. 1989. 'What Makes a Grammar Test Communicative?' Mimeo of paper delivered at IATEFL Language Testing Colloquium, Bournemouth 1989.

Rea-Dickins P. and Woods E. 1988. 'Some criteria for the development of communicative grammar tasks'. TESOL Quarterly 22/4: 623-46.

Rutherford W. 1987. Second Language Grammar: Learning and Teaching. London: Longman.

Strawson P.F. 1952. Introduction to Logical Theory. Oxford: Methuen.

Thomson A.J. and Martinet A.V. 1980. A Practical English Grammar. (3rd edition) Oxford: OUP.

Traugott E.C., Ter Meulen A., Reilly J.S., Ferguson, C.A. (eds) 1986. On Conditionals. Cambridge: CUP.